

Gothic and the Orient in the British Imagination

with

Particular Reference to the Nineteenth Century

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## Conclusion

Within the folds of the previous chapters, Gothic has been shown to lend itself to multiple "othering" processes. However, this thesis has focused on the orientalized "Others" of the nineteenth-century British Gothic Novel. Interestingly, the Gothic genre and modern Orientalism start towards the end of the eighteenth century and each one of them extends and develops itself differently to the present day.

Gothic, by definition, lends itself to nightmarish, preternatural, uncanny and out-of-the-ordinary experiences which destabilize the most self-controlled of all characters in Gothic novels. Orientalist Gothic doubles this effect of destabilization and uncanniness due to the combined forces of Gothic and Orientalism which have been shown to share many characteristics. The most important of these is the "othering" of the Oriental by the British novel and the projection of all the moral and national dangers on it, hence the need for exorcizing and/ or controlling the "othered" Oriental. Therefore, in such combined cases of Orientalist Gothic, gothicism is at one of its bleakest of all its instances.

This research, moreover, has differentiated between early Romantic Gothic and later Victorian Gothic. Vathek, "The Vampyre" and Zofloya which are written in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, are discussed together in Chapter Three. Except for the novella, those Romantic Gothic novels give credit, slim though it is and only skin-deep, to the contemporary Orient they are portraying. In other words, some beauty, progress, excellence or transcendence is accorded to the Orient. More importantly, the Orient/al can be the central stage of the action of the novel. It is not relegated to short scenes of menace as in the middle of the nineteenth century nor is it referred to only in flashbacks as happens later in the self-same century. In both novels, the authors themselves are in many ways atypical.

Thus their front-staging of the Orient/al cannot be taken to mean a general trend in the Gothic of that period. However, the authors themselves could be seen as prophets of the change that would take place later in the century.

Although the Orient is incidental to the Gothic plot of the mid-century, when mentioned it signals undiluted evil, unmitigated horror and gross primitivity. In such cases, Orientalist Gothic points to "difference within difference" in passing allusions and references as in Dorian Gray where the already eccentric Gray yearns for the irregular beauties and marginal cultures of the "Others." Those "Others" are denied co-evalness and sometimes full humanity. In other novels such as Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, the Orient is used to gothicize an experience; here it is the experience of opium addiction. The Orient can be used in yet a different way, typically to define the self against a constructed underground "Other" as in Frankenstein and Drood.

Later Gothic novels which are written towards the end of the nineteenth century are discussed in Chapter Five. Those go under the category of colonial (Orientalist) Gothic and I find them dealing extensively with the Oriental "Other" who is also the colonized subject. In such novels, the main Gothic character is an ancient Oriental "Other" but the main setting is modern imperial home. The centralization of the Oriental character and its gothicization are very suggestive. They point to the intimate connection between Culture (Novel as a manifestation of it) and Imperialism since the Oriental "Other" had become a central imperial playfield by that time. In fact, a parallelism could be drawn between the heightened awareness of the Oriental "Other" by the British culture as is evident in The Beetle and the Jewel and the equally heightened imperial activity in those colonies and especially in Africa during



the same period. The Novel is deeply implicated in empire-making and in the Scramble for Africa.

All Orientalist Gothic novels, regardless the period they are written in, employ the Orient to define the loci of evil or irrationality in a rational— pseudo- historical or "scientific"— way and to displace evil, thenceforth, onto the Orient. All Orientalist Gothic novels also define, describe and then expel either fears of reversed colonization, gender blurring, the New Woman or a general national weakening by abjecting those fears or qualities onto the constructed "Other."

The research has also come to the conclusion that some Gothic texts such as "The Vampyre," Frankenstein, Drood and Dorian Gray might not be graded under Orientalist literature because in them the Orient is not central to the action of the novel. Nonetheless, multiple Orientalist misconceptions are inscribed on the pages of those novels. Further, they depend on the Orient, with different gradations, for their gothicism. As such, they could be described as Gothic novels with Orientalist leanings, since the Orient does not play a central role. Other novels as Vathek, The Beetle and The Jewel are Orientalist literature because their main subject is the Orient(al). Moreover, since their Orient is treated along the lines of the Gothic tradition, they can be categorized as Orientalist Gothic.

By applying different colonial discourse theories to Orientalist Gothic texts, colourfully divergent readings of this unofficial marriage between Gothic and Orientalism have been revealed. For example, Said's concept of the essential intertextuality of Orientalism, which degrades the Oriental and stereotypes him, and his proposition that Orientalism tells us more of the Orientalist than of the Orient have been shown as carrying a lot of truth in my reading of Vathek, Confessions, Gray

and The Beetle. Further, Said's belief that Orientalism is essentially a discourse circulated under the hegemony of the colonizing West has also been confirmed in all the novels analyzed in this research.

Moreover, cursory and casual references to the Orient which are made in an off-hand, one-sided and superior demeanour in Gothic novels presuppose and necessitate a previous versed knowledge of the "Orient." However, the research exposes how vacant such a claim is and how knowledge in such cases is based on a Foucauldian power that creates knowledge and not on "pure" or "disinterested" knowledge.

Bhabha's heterogenic understanding of the essentially unstable colonial experience, which is an undeniable feature of all the novels discussed in this research, helps show how unconfident, unwhole and insufficient the colonial master is in spite of a repetitive claim to a wholeness and a completeness which is falsely claimed to overflow the self and to demand extraterritorial expansion. Ironically, this repetition itself denotes self-doubt and a discursive "fact" that needs to be incessantly repeated for reassurance. This essential lack in the colonizer and the consequent denial of it give rise to reversed expectations. Those reversed expectations arise due to the essentially hybrid nature of the colonial experience and hence, the unexpected variation of the imposed codes of conduct when applied in a different colonial context. Such a "repeatable materiality" allows mimicry, which the colonizer aims at, to turn into mockery and allows the imperial gaze to be gazed back at in an overall uncanny setting and atmosphere.

Applying Behdad's theories of self-exoticism and of heteroglossia to Dickens's Drood have revealed how such colonial behaviours and colonial discourses



unintentionally voice the unsaid and how the unconscious of the text usually yearns for and depends on the "Other." Moreover, Behdad's understanding of the Uncanny discloses how the uncanny is an essential part of the self-exoticizing process conducted by the colonizer that helps him to identify himself against a strange and foreign "Other."

Pratt's understanding of colonial interactions—whether in the colonized territory or the colonizing home—as two-sided gives the Oriental his share in the colonial experience. He is not only a receiver but also a maker of events, culture and even of the subjectivity of the colonizer. This dual traffic she terms a contact zone. And we meet contact zones especially in Drood, The Beetle and The Jewel. Yet, because the colonizer denies any influence from the margin, such contact zones and any further interaction issuing from them are portrayed as gothic, violent and threatening in the said Orientalist Gothic novels.

It is recommended for further research to trace the change, if any, which takes place in twentieth-century Gothic up to the present day.<sup>58</sup> It will also be worthwhile to compare such Orientalist Gothic literature with the contemporary events of the Arab spring which contest the Orientalist manoeuvre of essentializing tyranny vis-à-vis

<sup>58</sup> The researcher has noticed an ostensible change that took place in modern twentieth-century Gothic novels in the portrayal of the gothicized "Other." It is markedly clear that in modern Gothic the line of demarcation between binary opposites grows ever more dim and blurry in accordance with a post-modern view of the world where all absolutes are toppled. Consequently, binaries become dialectical and fluid rather than rigid, unchanging and self-sustained entities; hence the somehow tolerant portrayal of "evil" in Gothic since evil and goodness can no longer be easily defined and separated. This is clear in Interview with the Vampire (1976) where the vampire is humanized and sympathized with. The Orient and its constructions, unfortunately, have no share in the somehow humanized turn that Gothic figures have attained, now that they are not portrayed as wholly evil. The Exorcist (1971) by William Peter Blatty, expectedly, locates the source of evil in Iraq, where the discovery of a small statue of the demon Pazuzu initiates all evil in the novel. Interestingly, Blatty based this story on a 1949 exorcism that he had heard about while he was a student in the class of 1950 at Georgetown University, a Jesuit and Catholic school. In reality, the story was thoroughly English, with real English people, English demons and English doctors and priests. However, when fantasizing it, Blatty had to resort to the Orient to add horror and inscrutability to the story, and not to forego the opportunity of making use of the stereotypical image of the horrifying East that still inspires dreadful feelings in the Western mind. The same Orientalist turn of mind could be found in Anne Rice's The Mummy: Our Ramses the Damned (1989) and The Elixir of Life (2006) by Bernard Knight. However, more novels have to be consulted before reaching this conclusion and hence, the need for further extensive research.

naturally submissive and subdued Oriental masses as in Vathek. The Arab spring also contests the manoeuvre of essentializing the time gap between the Orient and the Occident which makes of the Orient a characteristically Gothic place.